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CRITICISMS AND DISCUSSIONS.

GENTILE ELEMENTS IN CHRISTIANITY.

Inasmuch as Christianity in its beginnings was dependent on the Jewish religion it contains various doctrines and views which Judaism had previously adopted from other religions. But even without the mediation of Judaism other cycles of thought have exerted an influence on the original form of Christianity. Modern research in the history of religion has bestowed such zealous care on the determination of these foreign elements, that now there is no serious difference of opinion except with regard to the scope of the foreign elements. Our most eminent theologians, men like Harnack¹ and Gunkel,² call Christianity in plain words a syncretistic religion.

The dogmas derived from Parsism come decidedly first of all under consideration. We know that the Jews have borrowed from Parsism the doctrines of the immortality of the soul, of the resurrection and judgment after death, of heaven and hell, of the angels, and principally also of Satan, and that these originally Zarathustrian doctrines have found their way from Judaism into Christianity. If we ask about the period in which these entirely revolutionary religious views have penetrated into Judaism, the most obvious reply would be that the borrowing took place during the exile in Babylonia (which had been a Persian province since 538). But these assumptions which are so probable on *a priori*

¹ *Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, 2d ed., I, p. 261f. On pages 262-263 we read: "Since the middle of the third century Christianity is to be regarded as a syncretistic religion in the widest sense. . . . It was syncretistic from the very beginning on Gentile-Christian ground. It did not appear as a mere gospel but decked out with all that the Jewish religion had appropriated throughout its long history, accepting at once whatever might still be lacking. But now, about the middle of the third century, the new religion was ready for the first time as the syncretistic religion *par excellence*. . . ."

² *Zum religionsgeschichtlichen Verständnis des Neuen Testaments*. Göttingen, 1903, p. 95.

grounds do not find support in the Old Testament. Belief in immortality and the resurrection is first established there at so late a date that we are compelled to give up the idea that Parsism exerted any appreciable influence on the Jewish religion during the exile. The belief in resurrection does not appear³ until in the book of Daniel (165 B. C.), and then seems to be very generally diffused in the New Testament. But otherwise there is nowhere any mention of immortality, even in the post-exilic writings of the Old Testament—with one exception which, however, testifies exactly *against* a belief in immortality. The preacher Solomon is acquainted with the belief in it but is very doubtful whether it is justified (Eccl. iii. 20-21): "All go unto one place; all are of the dust and all turn to dust again. Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?" The Psalms, of which by far the greater part is post-exilic, know nothing of immortality, although it would have fitted so well into their line of thought. Accordingly therefore everything is in favor of the idea that these views first reached the Jews in the Grecian period—though not from Grecian quarters—but then quickly became popular with them.

Consequently I agree in this point with Van den Bergh van Eysinga who, following Erik Stave, does not regard the influence of Parsism on Judaism as a consequence of direct contact between Jews and Persians in the time of the Achaemenids, but explains it from the general spirit of the time which had prevailed since the days of Alexander.⁴ From this standpoint we can also easily understand at once that the Parsi doctrines have not found entrance into later Judaism in their original pure form but in a mixture with foreign elements, especially the Babylonian. On this subject H. Zimmern says:⁵ "Far more important than the Babylonian material, because exhibiting more striking parallels to the New Testament Christology, appear on the other hand, for instance, certain mythologemas of Parsism connected especially with the figure of Mithra. This naturally follows as completely established also from a purely chronological point of view. Nevertheless later Judaism in Babylonia came into particularly close contact with

³ H. Gunkel, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

⁴ *Indische Einflüsse auf evangelische Erzählungen*, Göttingen, 1909, 2d ed., p. 111. In a much later time Parsi elements have entered directly into Christian writings. Ernst Kuhn has published an interesting treatise in the *Festgruss an Rudolf von Roth* (Stuttgart, 1893, p. 217f) on the Christian garb in which the Zoroastrian prophecy of the future saviour has been dressed.

⁵ *Zum Streit um die "Christusmythe,"* Berlin, 1910, p. 6; cf. also pp. 22, 50.

the Persian religion which lasted for centuries. Therefore we can easily account for the presence of Persian elements to a considerable extent, for instance, in the Messianic ideas of later Judaism. And yet, as has already been justly emphasized in various quarters, it was not the pure Iranian form of the Persian religion which exerted an influence on Judaism in Babylonia, but rather a form of Parsism within Babylonia in which many elements had found admittance from the older Babylonian religion already established there and which accordingly represents a mingling of Babylonian and Persian religious material."⁶

Nevertheless we must not estimate too highly these Babylonian admixtures of Parsism. What originally Babylonian ideas have finally found a place in Christianity are much more insignificant than is assumed by the noted advocates of Babylonism with Jensen at their head. Even the discreet and temperate Zimmern⁷ seems to me still to overestimate the force of his parallels which to some extent cannot be compared with the parallel tales of Buddhism and the Gospels. Aside from details in Revelations which are based upon undeniably Babylonian ideas,⁸ and from the demonology "which plays a great part in the time of Jesus as we learn from the Synoptists, and which strongly resembles that of ancient Babylonia,"⁹ there remain, on careful consideration, hardly any other traces of the ancient Babylonian religion projected from the Judaic into the Christian religion than a few adornments of the Messianic picture and the day of rest at the end of the week of seven days.

Next in importance to the Parsi influences on Christianity stands the Hellenistic influence which is shown—especially, as is well known, in the Gospel of John and even more in the writings of St. Paul—in the introduction of the Logos as divine reason, in the identification of Christ with the Logos, in the doctrine of Christ's preexistence based upon it, and in sundry allegorical interpretations.

There are probably still other foreign influences on primitive Christianity which belong to those above mentioned, even though they can not be demonstrated with equal certainty—above all the frequently assumed influences of ancient Oriental forms of faith,

⁶ Gunkel also expresses himself to this effect. See *op. cit.*, pp. 18, 30, 36, 76. Mithra is identified with Shamash.

⁷ In Eb. Schrader, *Die Keilinschriften und das Alte Testament*, 3d ed., Part II, pp. 345f as well as in the pamphlet just cited.

⁸ Gunkel, *op. cit.*, pp. 3f, 42f.

⁹ Gunkel, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

having for the object of their veneration a dying and reviving God, on the narrative of the death and resurrection of Christ. Largarde¹⁰ says: "The death of Jesus transposes these ancient sages into a higher key from flat to sharp," and explains the belief in the resurrection of the Saviour as an unconscious transference of these ancient myths upon the beloved Master. Such deities appearing in the mythologies of neighboring lands, all of which probably represent nature dying in the winter and reviving in spring, are the Babylonian Tamuz, the Phenician Adonis, the Egyptian Osiris, the Phrygian Attis and the Greek (originally Thracic-Phrygian) Dionysus.

Among the primitive ideas universally diffused throughout the earth which have taken effect in the presentation of the life of Christ in the Gospels, we must count with equal probability the ideas of the necessity of a human sacrifice for the salvation of all and of the magic power of baptism with water and the notion of partaking of the god.

Nevertheless the conviction that all these foreign elements are recognizable in the New Testament and that there is no more history in our Gospels than perhaps—to select a convenient example for me—in the ancient Buddhist Pâli sources, does not admit of any doubt with regard to the historicity of the person of Christ. Though our Gospels may bear in part a legendary character, yet the powerful personality of Christ shines out from them in sharp outlines and complete distinctness with a doctrine and diction of its own. And although the most radical direction of modern Jesus research does not concede it, there is at least one argument which weighs more heavily than all the reasons put together in recent times for the historicity of Jesus, and which supplies a positively irrefutable proof for the historical Christ and for an authentic tradition from his own times which was utilized by the evangelists. I here set forth this reason in the words of Arthur Schopenhauer,¹¹ which are now mentioned but rarely and deserve to be called to mind:

"That our Gospels are based on the whole upon some sort of an original, or at least a fragment, from the time and environment of Jesus himself, I would conclude exactly from that prophecy which has proved such a stumbling-block, foretelling that the end of the

¹⁰ *Deutsche Schriften*, 231.

¹¹ In the treatise "On Religion," *Sämtliche Werke*, Reclam ed., V, pp. 403-404.

world and the glorious return of the Lord in the clouds was still to take place during the lifetime of some who were present when the promise was given (Matt. x. 23; xvi, 28; Mark ix. 1; Luke ix. 27).¹² That these very promises remained unfulfilled is an excessively annoying circumstance which has not only made trouble in later times but caused embarrassments to Paul and Peter, as is discussed extensively by Reimarus in his very readable book *Vom Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger* (sections 42-44). Now if the Gospels had been written about a hundred years later without actual contemporary documents, good care would have been taken not to introduce prophecies of this kind which it was very clear at that time had conspicuously not been fulfilled. Nor would those passages have been introduced in the Gospels from which Reimarus with keen insight has constructed what he calls the first system of the disciples, and according to which Jesus to them was only a secular liberator of the Jews, if the writers of the Gospels had not worked on the basis of contemporary documents which contained such passages."

In mentioning the foreign religions which have furnished ingredients to Christianity, I have not yet mentioned India. I have set myself the task to investigate and present in an entire volume¹³ the connections between India and Christianity in their historical and religious relations. I shall there have occasion to treat the much discussed question of Buddhist influences on the New Testament and hope to bring it nearer to a satisfactory solution, after having considered the interesting material for years without prepossession for either side. That generally speaking Buddhism is the only Indian religion that can come into consideration, and that Brahmanism has not exerted any influence on Christianity requires no proof; for Krishnaism which would be the only other possibility has sought and found no extension outside of the world of India.

The question of influences on the New Testament has an entirely different meaning in Buddhism than with respect to those religions which have had an effect on the origin of Christian dogmas. With respect to Buddhism the problem concerns entirely only

¹² It will not do to declare these passages ungenueine because we should ask in vain who could have had any interest in interpolating them. Cf. B. Weiss, *Die Religion des Neuen Testaments*, p. 309: "It is quite futile to try to do away by exegetical or critical violence with the fact that Jesus promised that he would return to his own generation."

¹³ *Indien und das Christentum*, Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr, 1914. An English translation is in preparation under the title *Christianity and the Religions of India*, and the present article is adapted from its Introduction.

the coloring of the life of Christ in the Gospels. On Christian doctrine itself Buddhism can not have exerted any considerable influence for the reason that as a religion it stands in sharpest contrast to Christianity in its preconceptions and dogmas. I need not enter into this any farther because it has been done often enough by those who are qualified¹⁴—and still oftener by those who are not qualified. Whoever will take the trouble to look through the *Orientalische Bibliographie*¹⁵ will find dozens of books, essays and lectures on this subject.

That in spite of the above-mentioned relations the problem of Buddhist influence on the New Testament has long aroused a greater and more general interest than the question of other foreign influences on primitive Christianity, is mainly due to the striking similarity which many narratives and sayings in the earliest Buddhist and Christian sources exhibit in spite of the fundamental difference between the two great world religions.

Here we can barely touch upon those similarities between Buddhism and Christianity in which the possibility of historical connection is excluded and so confirms a parallel independent development.¹⁶ By this statement we do not intend to say that they are in themselves any less worthy of interest. Coincidences of this kind press in great number upon the attention of any one who will make comparisons. First of all we think of the analogous relation in which Buddhism and Christianity stand to the national religions of their home lands, to Brahmanism and Judaism, from which they have developed and which they have successfully resisted in order then to enter upon their world-subduing triumphal course—Christianity to the west and Buddhism to the east, so that now the silent ocean separates the realms of their expansion. Both re-

¹⁴ I would emphasize the following treatises as particularly valuable: Nisikānta Chattopādhyāya, "Buddhismus und Christentum," two essays in *Indische Essays*, Zurich, 1883, pp. 85f; A. Bertholet, *Buddhismus und Christentum*, 2d ed., Tübingen, 1909; L. von Schröder, "Buddhismus und Christentum, was sie gemein haben und was sie unterscheidet," in *Reden und Aufsätze*, Leipsic, 1913, pp. 85f, and the terse antitheses of E. Windisch in *Buddha's Geburt und die Lehre von der Seelenwanderung*, Leipsic, 1908, p. 217, 218. L. von Schröder, who places Christianity high above Buddhism, shows at the end of his above-mentioned essay that he is not blind to some advantages of Buddhism, but points out that with its undeniable gentleness and toleration towards other faiths it furnishes a mortifying model, and is distinguished by the fact that self-righteousness and religious pride are less common faults among its adherents than among Christians.

¹⁵ Revised and edited by Lucian Scherman.

¹⁶ K. E. Neumann, *Die innere Verwandtschaft buddhistischer und christlicher Lehren*, Leipsic, 1891, shoots far above the mark. Cf. Leblois, "Christianisme et Bouddhisme" in *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, XXIII, p. 351.

ligions assumed their missionary tendency and universal character very soon after their birth and show remarkable similarities also with respect to the development of doctrine and its establishment in great councils. Even the external form of the original doctrine corresponds in so far as the founders of both religions have preferably used popular comparisons and parables besides vigorous maxims. Windisch¹⁷ has called attention to similarities in the literary form of the earliest Buddhist and Christian tradition. But all this is of less importance than the circumstance that both Buddhism and Christianity preach withdrawal from the world and its pleasures, with a pessimistic aspect in their judgment of the activities of the world; that they both are religions of salvation although they understand salvation in a very different sense, Buddhism as liberation from suffering and from the necessity of continued life, and Christianity as the liberation from sin and its consequences; and that almost the same demands in the moral realm are made by both religions, namely meekness, kindness, patience, mercy, forgiveness of wrong, yea, self-sacrifice and love of one's enemies. In all this neither of the two religions has copied the other. Everything has arisen independently.

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DEUSSEN'S PHILOSOPHY OF THE BIBLE.

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION.

Professor Deussen's new book, *Die Philosophie der Bibel*, is a highly instructive, interesting and most comprehensive statement of the modern situation of Bible study. Properly speaking it is not a philosophy of the Bible, but Professor Deussen's own philosophy with reference to that collection of books which reverently we call "the Bible." The book is really a confession of faith and reflects the religious attitude of progressive mankind at the present date.

Professor Deussen has studied in Schulpforta. He has been trained in literary criticism and has incidentally learned to apply the scientific method also to the scriptures. While a university student at Bonn, he lost the rest of his dogmatic faith, but he regained the spirit of it in his philosophical studies, of which the most important documents to him were Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*. The former saved him

¹⁷ *Buddhas Geburt*, 218, 219.